Beyond the fun, the beds serve a serious purpose: Laisney firmly believes that they reduce stress and produce happier, more comfortable animals who are more likely to appeal to potential adopters.

The pillow-like, often brightly colored beds lend “a friendly and positive image to the cage,” helping to enhance a shelter’s institutional look, says Danielson. “… It softens it up. The animals seem to be happier with them. Maybe it’s like a little taste of home.”

At the Escondido Humane Society, executive director Sally Costello says her shelter previously had animals sleeping on towels and a mishmash of donated beds. Now it has Kennel Comforters’ custom beds made from bright, durable fleece fabrics—measured to fit, with a consistent look. “We looked a little more disorganized, and now we look bright and more cheerful and uniform,” Costello says.

If you regularly came home to find piles of fabric and stuffing on your front doorstep, you’d probably get a little annoyed. But for Joan Laisney, the piles represent comfort and joy—not for her, but for the hundreds of shelter animals the materials will end up with, once she and her team are done with them.

Laisney likes to sew and had adopted one cat, but she wasn’t terribly familiar with animal shelters. Yet in October 2007, something possessed her to visit the County of San Diego Department of Animal Services’ shelter in her home of Carlsbad, Calif.—and volunteer to repair the animal beds.

She stitched up a few, then realized it would be easier to make new ones. After that, Laisney, a retiree who worked a variety of jobs, including one as an airline attendant, says things “just sort of evolved.”

Today, she’s the founder and coordinator of Kennel Comforters, a group with about 40 core volunteers who cut fabric and sew, stuff, and deliver pet beds to three county shelters and several humane societies in the San Diego area. The group has produced nearly 4,700 free beds for shelters, “which sounds like a lot, but that’s a drop in the bucket,” Laisney says. The three county shelters alone take in about 26,000 animals a year, according to department director Dawn Danielson.

The group relies largely on the kindness of strangers to supply its materials, and Laisney believes there’s serendipity at work. “I mean, when we’re totally out of stuffing, it appears. It just shows up,” she says. “When we’re out of fabric, somebody will just drive up, either to the shelter or my house, and just unload bolts of fabric.”

She’s not exactly sure how she got where she is, but she believes it’s all happening for a reason.

Sometimes she returns to her home in Carlsbad to find donated fabric and stuffing sitting on her doorstep, waiting to be turned into pet beds. The locals depositing the material know Laisney as “The Bed Lady.” “I’m sure that’s what it’s gonna say on my tombstone,” she quips.

Kennel Comforters volunteers come by Laisney’s house to pick up fabric so they can work at home. Members of the group also get together monthly at the shelter in Carlsbad, where Laisney has earned a reputation as a stern taskmaster. “I get told I’m running a sweatshop,” she says. “… It’s like, ‘Quit texting, let’s go, ladies. … I got a quota here.’ It’s all in good fun.”

Laisney calls what the group does “slam sewing,” a quantity-first approach that runs contrary to the seamstresses’ typical emphasis on precision. “My volunteers want the thread to match, or they want the bottom to match the top,” she says. But after making so many hundreds of beds herself, she doesn’t care if the beds match anymore.

The shelter pets don’t seem to either. “I’ve never had a customer complain,” she says.
Kennel Comforters also produces cat cage curtains, which provide a little privacy for new arrivals and frightened kitties, and can help thwart the spread of disease. “It really keeps down—excuse the language—the snot factor” in a roomful of cats with upper respiratory infections, Laisney notes.

And an entirely different enterprise grew out of Kennel Comforters. As Laisney spent more time in shelters, she noticed the multiple scratch marks on crates. She had an “aha” moment that led to her first (and she swears her last) invention: cardboard “scratchers” that attach to the inside of cat cages with twist ties, providing a simple way for shelter cats to relieve stress.

Laisney contracts with a cardboard company to produce the scratchers, which she stores in her garage. She sells them (at $85 for a case of 50) to shelters around the country through StretchandScratch.com. She encourages shelters to put the scratchers on their wish lists, so people can buy and donate them. When cats are adopted, the scratchers can go home with them; the new owners can cut off the ties and set the scratchers on the floor.

The business is “so far in the red, it’s pathetic,” Laisney says, though she has about 400 customers and hopes to one day make enough money from the scratchers to sustain Kennel Comforters and possibly fund bed-making groups nationwide. The scratchers have garnered rave reviews from shelters and even attracted the interest of researchers studying stress in cats in small environments, she says.

The path might have chosen her, but Laisney (who has since adopted a second cat) appears to be pleased with the results. “I didn’t start out with a big plan,” she says. “I just started out with an idea, and I am frankly amazed what one person can do if they just put their mind to it.”
A Lost Pet is Not a Lost Cause

Website aims for happy reunions

Searching to find a lost pet can be an agonizing and often fruitless experience. But The Center for Lost Pets (thecenterforlostpets.com) hopes to fundamentally improve the way people look for their missing companion animals and increase the number of happy reunions.

Created by Liz Blackman—founder of Help4Pets Inc., a company founded in 1996 to help shelters by promoting adoption, raising funds, and providing pet identification solutions—the website serves as one central location where people who have lost or found pets can connect.

Her website also acts as a portal with links to nine other sites where users can click to search for their missing animals. The Center for Lost Pets gives owners an all-inclusive place to turn for help—kind of a “one-stop shopping” approach, according to Betsy McFarland, senior director of the Companion Animals section of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

The HSUS is partnering with Blackman’s site because the number of lost pets entering animal shelters who are reunited with their families remains low. “Clearly, that’s a big problem, and part of helping to end euthanasia in shelters is trying to get lost pets back home,” McFarland says. The HSUS wants to increase the number of pets being returned home, as well as make it easier for people to know where to go when they’ve lost a pet.

The website features advice on what steps people can take if a dog or cat is missing, as well as tips on how to use Internet search engines to look for more lost-and-found resources, including in local communities.

“It allows them to go and see what else they can do, in addition to going to the animal shelter, which of course we encourage everyone to do,” McFarland says. “So I think it’s just one more tool in the toolbox for shelters to use in order to reunite people with their lost pets.”
Carriage Horse Update

In our May-June 2010 issue we reported on efforts to abolish the horse-drawn carriage business in New York City—a longstanding tradition that many animal welfare advocates consider inhumane (“Trotting on Empty,” p. 10).

After that issue of Animal Sheltering went to press, the New York City Council adopted an industry-backed bill that increases the rates that carriage drivers may charge for rides and calls for some improvements in the way the horses are treated. The bill, which the council approved 43-4 and Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed into law in late April, mandates stalls that allow horses to lie down and requires that horses get five weeks off per year, among other provisions.

Patrick Kwan, The Humane Society of the United States’ New York State director, called the council’s action disappointing, noting that the bill “will not protect carriage horses from being sent to slaughter, and the horses will continue to be forced to work in dangerous traffic conditions every day, and often in harsh weather, where their lives and welfare are threatened.”

Advocates continue to push for two other bills before the council, one that would ban New York’s carriage horse industry immediately, and one that would phase it out by replacing the horse-drawn carriages with eco-friendly replicas of antique cars.

Correction: “Trotting on Empty” incorrectly spelled the last name of Jake Dilemani, a lobbyist for New Yorkers for Clean, Livable, and Safe Streets.

Book Review
Animal Control Management: A New Look at a Public Responsibility

Any new director of an animal care and control department—regardless of whether she has longtime experience or is coming into her position from another field entirely—is likely to have lots of questions as she examines what about the agency is working smoothly and what needs to be improved. What are the advantages of managing a municipal animal control authority through the public works department versus the health department? What skills should an animal control manager have, and what are some questions a new department leader should ask when assessing top job priorities? What are the basic forms and records an animal control department needs? How should its website function?

It’d be difficult to come up with a question about modern animal control that’s not addressed in Stephen Aronson’s comprehensive new book, Animal Control Management: A New Look at a Public Responsibility (401 pages, Purdue University Press, $39.95). The book should serve as a valuable resource for animal control directors evaluating their agencies’ work, ACOs and other staff seeking to learn about the bigger picture, and for city managers and other decision-makers who may need a basic education on the staffing and funding needs of an effective animal control department.

Aronson delves into everything from the complications of contracting and working with rescue groups to managing staffing issues and dangerous-dog legislation. He also provides a series of useful appendices with forms for hiring, requests for service proposals, and sample agreements for partnering with rescues.—CA
Closer to the Magic Pill?
Symposium brings together those interested in nonsurgical sterilization

BY ARNA COHEN

For decades, those laboring in the trenches of animal care and control facilities and humane societies have dreamed of the magic pill—or, more likely, the magic shot—that would render animals sterile without the need for surgery. The dream is a particularly big one for those working in developing nations, where stray and feral dogs still roam the streets in packs, and where resources for spay/neuter surgeries are even more limited than they are stateside.

While the dream is not yet a reality, the exchange of information and ideas at a groundbreaking symposium held in April in Dallas has the potential to bring it a little closer. The 4th International Symposium on Non-Surgical Contraceptive Methods of Pet Population Control brought together 185 scientists, veterinarians, animal welfare professionals, public health advocates, pharmaceutical company representatives, and funders from 25 countries to discuss advances in the development of long-term, nonsurgical contraception for companion animals. The meeting also spotlighted the Michelson Prize and Grants in Reproductive Biology—a $25 million award to be given to the first entity to create a safe, practical, and permanent nonsurgical sterilant for male and female cats and dogs, and up to $50 million in other grants for promising research.

The symposium, co-sponsored by the Alliance for Contraception in Cats & Dogs (ACC&D) and the Found Animals Foundation, featured two tracks—a science-focused track that reviewed current animal-related research as well as human-centered studies that could have applications in animals; and an implementation track that discussed how nonsurgical techniques could be employed in the field. The implementation track also included a discussion and hands-on training session on the use of EsterilSol, a permanent injectable contraceptive for male dogs that has been used in some developing countries.
The Michelson Prize, established in 2008 by the Found Animal Foundation’s founder Gary Michelson, M.D., is specifically for the creation of a single product that will work on both male and female cats and dogs, but the symposium sponsors are also interested in treatments that would be effective for one gender or species or for shorter time periods, explains Joyce Briggs, president of ACC&D. Studies and experience have shown that the lifespan of feral cats and street dogs is frequently less than three years. "If you could suppress reproduction for three or three and a half years, you could make a huge dent in the number of litters born," she says.

A nonsurgical approach is "so much less intensive" than surgery, says Nancy Peterson, feral cat program manager for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), who participated in the implementation track and notes that anesthesia—required for surgical sterilization—often creates complications. EsterilSol, on the other hand, requires only mild sedation, involves almost no recovery period, no pain, and much less time—a real bonus for unowned animals and ferals, Peterson points out.

Symposium attendees came from as far as Australia and Africa, where an effective nonsurgical contraceptive would be a tremendous boon in areas with little or no medical resources. Gudush Jalloh traveled from Sierra Leone, where he is the only private practice veterinarian in the entire country and has singlehandedly vaccinated and sterilized almost 56,000 community and street dogs. "It was really inspiring to hear people like him talk about their desperate need for nonsurgical sterilization to really be able to make a difference," says Briggs.

The big money behind the Michelson grant is attracting interest from scientists working in areas such as human immunology and genetics who otherwise might not have considered that their research could apply to animals. "We’re seeing people coming from all kinds of different scientific disciplines that are not necessarily veterinary-related and trying to use their techniques and their approaches to apply to this problem," says Aimee Gilbreath, executive director of the Found Animals Foundation.

Scott Coonrod, associate professor of epigenetics and reproductive biology at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, expressed his enthusiasm and optimism for the project during his opening remarks for his own presentation on the immunological approach to sterilization. He attended the very first ACC&D meeting in 2000, he said, and while it left him hopeful, he wasn’t sure what the long-term effect would be. "Today … I’m so optimistic that the new nonsurgical sterilant is going to be developed. I think it’s in the near future, not long term like I imagined a few years ago."
In the three days following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Southern Pines Animal Shelter lost electricity and had no running water. Located about 65 miles north of the Gulf Coast, the shelter didn’t take the brunt of the storm, but still struggled in its wake.

Virginia Cheatham, who’s managed the Hattiesburg, Miss., shelter for the past 12 years, remembers that she and her husband, who live about halfway to the coast, gathered water from a creek in garbage cans, brought it to the shelter, and gave it to dogs by flashlight.

But Southern Pines officials say some good rose out of the devastation, as Katrina set in motion a chain of events that led to the shelter partnering with national humane organizations and, last summer, opening a spay/neuter clinic.

After Katrina, Southern Pines was “blessed” by a visit from representatives of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and other national animal welfare organizations, says Valerie Rachal, who was then a board member and now serves as the spay/neuter clinic director. The visit allowed the group “to see the reality of Mississippi shelters—that we have wonderful, adoptable, healthy pets that are being euthanized by the thousands,” Rachal says.

It also served as the springboard for Southern Pines, a municipal shelter that takes in animals from 12 counties, to send four representatives to The HSUS’s annual Animal Care Expo in May 2008. (Two received scholarship money from The HSUS to attend.) After networking with colleagues from around the country and listening to ideas about how to improve animal sheltering services, “you realize you’re not on an island alone, and that we can accomplish a whole lot more,” says Karen Reidenbach, president of the shelter’s board of directors.

On one of their last evenings at Expo, the Southern Pines representatives discussed establishing a spay/neuter clinic. The shelter already gave adopters vouchers for spay/neuter surgeries by local veterinarians, and twice a month it hosted Mississippi Spay and Neuter’s Little Fix Rig, a trailer equipped as a mobile surgery unit. The initiatives boosted regional spay/neuter numbers, Rachal says, but fell short of meeting the community’s immense need.

So Southern Pines applied for and received a planning grant and a clinic equipment grant from PetSmart Charities, Rachal says, and also got “a very generous and surprising $35,000 grant” from The HSUS to fill some remaining gaps. In addition, Southern Pines staff received training at the Asheville, N.C.-based Humane Alliance, which offers training and technical assistance to help open spay/neuter clinics. The Southern Pines clinic opened in July 2009 in a remodeled building about six miles from the shelter.

“We’re very proud of it,” Rachal says of the 3,500-square-foot freestanding building, which the shelter leases. With office furniture and artwork donated by a local physician, she says the clinic looks nicer than many private doctors’ offices. The clinic has a staff of seven (separate from the shelter staff of 12 to 15), including a full-time veterinarian, and utilizes about 10 volunteers.
Karen Reidenbach, president of the board of directors for Southern Pines Animal Shelter, sees a silver lining in the hardships the shelter has endured. Hurricane Katrina, for example, helped the shelter forge relationships with national humane organizations.

Karen Reidenbach, president of the board of directors for Southern Pines Animal Shelter, sees a silver lining in the hardships the shelter has endured. Hurricane Katrina, for example, helped the shelter forge relationships with national humane organizations.

The clinic’s goal is to perform 6,400 spay/neuter surgeries a year, or about 32 per day, Rachal says. In its first eight and a half months, the clinic did about 3,300 surgeries—short of the goal but understandable for a startup operation, she adds.

The shelter takes in about 10,000 animals a year. Intake dropped from 9,400 in 2008 to 8,794 last year—the first time Reidenbach has seen a decrease in her 13 years on the board.

Rachal acknowledges that the spay/neuter clinic is combating a longstanding Southern tradition. “The culture in the South, and we’ll say definitely the culture in Mississippi, is just different,” she says. “Generations of folks just never spayed and neutered their pets. It was a foreign thought. … We are seeing people come to the clinic that are sort of first-generation users of veterinary care, and this spay/neuter experience—for the bulk of our clients—is the first time those pets have ever been to a veterinarian.” When someone visits for a spay/neuter surgery, she says, staff often discuss heartworm and flea prevention as well.

Reidenbach adds that some residents have avoided spaying or neutering because they own multiple pets and figured they couldn’t afford surgery for all of them—a problem the clinic hopes to address by offering affordable prices. (The clinic’s everyday prices range from $35 for male cats to $65 for female dogs.)

In addition to opening the spay/neuter clinic, the shelter is searching for its first executive director, which Reidenbach expects to be “a full-time and then some job” that will bolster outreach efforts and increase funding. Southern Pines recently held an HSUS-funded rabies clinic at a local park, which provided 385 free rabies shots and allowed staff to distribute spay/neuter information and spread the word about the clinic, Rachal says.

The shelter is also now part of PetSmart Charities’ Rescue Waggin’ program, which transports shelter dogs from overpopulated areas to regions where they are in demand. The program enables Southern Pines to send as many as 50 dogs and puppies a month to Northern states.

But last December, in the middle of the pre-Christmas adoption rush and two weeks after celebrating its first Rescue Waggin’ transport, Southern Pines found its resilience tested again: Arson gutted the shelter’s office and killed four cats. Three days later, police arrested a shelter employee. “Our staff didn’t know that he was a suspect,” Reidenbach recalls, “and so when the police pulled up and drove him away in handcuffs, it was a real kick in the gut.”

Despite the adversity, shelter business continued. Staff set up a tent in the parking lot, and people continued to surrender animals. Rachal recalls, “You would see a folding table in the parking lot, with two staff members behind the folding table, trying to hold down paperwork that was trying to blow away. I saw our office manager sitting in the back, in the bed of her pickup truck, trying to work on payroll …” Other staffers worked out of their cars or took work home, Rachal says, but the shelter didn’t close for a single day.

After operating for months out of a makeshift office in the small, prefab building that houses cats, staff moved into a new office in March. Cheatham says the staff is “still looking for things that we don’t have any more.” But just as they came though Katrina, she knows they’ll come through this. “It’s been very trying, but everything just makes you stronger, and bigger.”
Spay it Ain’t So
Study on ovary retention and longevity shouldn’t affect shelter spaying practices

BY CARRIE ALLAN

It’s rare for Animal Sheltering to report on a study intended to shed light on human health, but when that study has the potential to affect a fundamental practice of the animal welfare field—spay/neuter—all bets are off.

Aging Cell is a scientific journal in the U.K. that focuses on the biology of human aging. In the October 2009 issue, it published “Exploring mechanisms of sex differences in longevity: lifetime ovary exposure and exceptional longevity in dogs.” The study was designed to shed more light on the gender differences in human longevity—specifically, why women live longer than men.

Researchers studied a group of 119 very old rottweilers in North America—all pet dogs, all with varying spay histories—and compared them to another group of 186 rottweilers who had typical lifespans. Like women, the researchers write, female dogs were more likely than males to achieve exceptional longevity. “However, removal of ovaries during the first 4 years of life ... erased the female survival advantage over males. In females that retained their ovaries for more than 4 years, likelihood of exceptional longevity increased to more than three times that of males.”

In essence, the study indicates that the longer a dog keeps her ovaries, the more likely she is to live to a ripe old age.

The study was limited to one breed of dog, and in a recent interview with JAVMA News, lead researcher David Waters noted that people should be cautious about extrapolating the results. “We studied purebred dogs living with responsible owners,” he said. “You could say our results aren’t pertinent to stray dogs or mongrel dogs.” The study also did not account for variables such as diet, exercise, housing differences, regularity of veterinary care, or an apparent familial connection among the participants with exceptional longevity.

It’s a troubling little ripple on an ocean of previous studies indicating the health and behavioral benefits of spay/neuter: reduction in uterine infections and breast cancer in females, significant reduction of prostate disease and elimination of testicular cancer in males. While a few studies have connected spaying or neutering to specific health problems, the general consensus among veterinarians has been that sterilization of cats and dogs is healthy for the animals, and that pediatric spay/neuter is nothing to be worried about.

Among shelter veterinarians and others who work in the animal care and control field, the consensus is even greater—for reasons that go beyond individual animal health. “Before widespread spay/neuter, shelters were euthanizing 13 million dogs and cats out of a total pet population of 65 million,” says Andrew Rowan, chief scientific officer at The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). “Today, with widespread spay/neuter, shelters are euthanizing 4 million dogs and cats out of a total pet population of 155 to 171 million. The nonsuffering and euthanasia of those animals has to count for something against the possible life extension for female dogs.”

Owners considering whether to spay a beloved pet rottweiler might do well take the research into consideration. But for organizations seeking to save more animals’ lives, says John Snyder, vice president of the Companion Animals section of The HSUS, sterilization remains one of the most vital tools.

In a joint statement about the study, The HSUS and the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association noted that they support further research into the issue of female dogs and longevity and into the impact of surgical sterilization on animal health. “However, we are compelled to give weight to the broader issue of the health and well-being of the companion animal population as a whole. Reducing the euthanasia of millions of companion animals each year remains our primary consideration. Therefore we will continue to urge pet owners to do their part to prevent animal overpopulation and homelessness by making the lifesaving choice to spay or neuter.”

Just add your organization’s contact information and branding, and hang the materials up in your lobby or hand them out at your front desk, as appropriate. You don’t even need to tear out the page: Go to animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces to download and print a clean PDF copy.

Send suggestions for future Mouthpieces to asm@humanesociety.org.
We humans have certain elemental needs. We need to eat, we need to sleep, we need to breathe … and of course, we need to show off our pets.

And if we can tie that need to the mission to reduce pet overpopulation, all the better.

The annual Spay Day Online Pet Photo Contest, coordinated by The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and its global affiliate, Humane Society International (HSI), supports spay/neuter efforts in the United States and abroad. Entrants post photos and descriptions of their pets online, and designate an eligible animal welfare organization to receive the money raised when viewers spend $1 apiece to vote for their favorites.

The contest began three years ago and is one feature of Spay Day, The HSUS’s annual campaign to call attention to spay/neuter to combat the euthanasia of homeless pets. The 16th annual Spay Day took place Feb. 23.

This year’s contest, which ran from Jan. 20 through March 4, attracted more than 32,000 photos and raised $527,000 for 225 animal welfare groups in 45 states and Puerto Rico, and another 63 groups around the world. Groups qualified for photo contest money in part by holding a Spay Day event in February—anything from a low-cost spay/neuter clinic to handing out literature outside a pet store to the ever-popular “spay-ghetti with no balls” fundraising dinners. All eligible organizations get a cut of the photo contest’s general fund and can raise additional money by having contestants designate them as their charity of choice.

The organizations that promote the contest most heavily to their members and supporters generate the most money, explains Vicki Stevens, U.S. Spay Day coordinator for The HSUS. This year, 68 organizations raised more than $1,000, and two raised more than $30,000.

Around the globe, the photo contest is “a truly rarified fundraiser,” notes Kelly Coladarci, an HSI program manager. It allows groups that may not be getting enough support or resources in their communities to raise funds and conduct outreach. Romania Animal Rescue raised more than $34,000 in this year’s contest—the highest amount of any...
Imagine if we all went to the same place when we lost or found a pet. Countless lost pets would be returned to the people who are missing them, freeing up space and resources in shelters for pets who need a good home.

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Trial by Fire

George the cat survived a terrible ordeal, thanks to the skill and compassion of an Ohio shelter’s staff

Over the years, the animal welfare movement has seen its share of legends: Pets given as gifts get surrendered, so don’t adopt animals at Christmas. Don’t place animals prior to Halloween, because they could end up as victims of animal sacrifice by local devil worshippers.

As the field has evolved, though, many shelter managers have realized that some of these stories are just that: stories, anecdotal at best and fictional at worst, driving an unjustified paranoia that might be preventing some animals from finding homes.

Many shelters have reconsidered their practices accordingly, deciding that holiday placements are just fine if they allow a shelter dog to fill the role of “the puppy under the Christmas tree.” Still others have found that Halloween promotions help black cats find good homes on the last day of October.

It’s a good trend overall. But every now and then a story comes along that serves to remind the field that there are reasons such stories got started: Sadly, not all of them are mythical.

George can attest to that.

George is a friendly, gray-and-white cat who’s currently serving as a mascot at the Toledo Area Humane Society, located in Maumee, Ohio. He arrived at the shelter the Monday after last Halloween, when humane agent Gene Boros responded to a call about a burned cat.

George had been an indoor/outdoor mouser at an auto repair shop, and his owner called after discovering horrible injuries to the cat’s face and front paws. He knew that he couldn’t afford to pay for veterinary care, so he relinquished the cat to Boros, who brought him to the shelter.

Boros says the burns were probably the worst he’s ever seen, “especially on a small animal like a cat. Most of his ears were burned off, his whole face was charred up, his eyes were basically burned closed. His nostrils were burned severely. You could hear him breathing very heavily and know that he would have to have some extreme care pretty soon.”

It was clear to Boros that the injuries weren’t accidental. Whether it was the crazed Satanists of shelter legend or just disturbed local teens playing a horrible prank, somebody had done this to the cat on purpose.

“We got it put on the local news here, trying to get people to call in if they saw or heard anything, but we never got any leads or calls. But definitely my first reaction was that it was something that was done to him by a human,” he says.

The cat had already seen the worst of human behavior. Boros and the rest of the shelter staff set out to show him the best. When Boros brought the cat in, Debbie Johnson, the shelter’s head veterinarian, found she had a kitty with the will to live.

“We see a lot of things here in the shelter, examples of cruelty, but I was shocked and immediately went to sedate him—I assumed he must be in severe pain—and I reached in the carrier … and he head-butted me,” says Johnson. “And I thought, ‘For Pete’s sake, I guess we’re gonna try and treat him!’”

It wasn’t clear whether the cat would survive, though. The veterinary staff wasn’t even sure if the cat had eyes, because he was burned so badly, his face a mask of charred skin.

“But we said, ‘Let’s give him 24-48 hours, and see if we can manage his pain and keep him comfortable, and if we can, great, and if we can’t, we’ll have to make a decision to euthanize him,’” Johnson says.

They had to pry the damaged tissue open to see if his eyes were intact—they were—and then they trimmed off his outer ear flaps (called pinnae). The staff kept the cat under heavy sedation so that he wouldn’t suffer as his burned skin started to scab and then contract.

George has slowly healed from his wounds. He looks much better now, but it’s still obvious this was a badly injured cat.

His burns have left their mark, and his wide-open eyes give him a bit of a perpetually surprised appearance. He blinks by closing his lower eyelids.

“He has upper lids, but the scar tissue has contracted so much that he really can’t move them. I’d like to talk to some veterinary soft-tissue surgeons to see if we can improve upon that, but we want to wait until all the tissue is finished healing before we go back in,” Johnson says.
While George’s exterior has been changed by his terrible burns, his personality remains the same.

“The thing about George is, he is one of the sweetest cats I’ve ever met and was right from the beginning. Even after undergoing this horrific injury, his interest was in being with people and being social,” says John Dinon, the shelter’s executive director. “Now he actually lives in the office; in fact, he’s here right now, sitting 10 feet from me. He has a steady stream of friends and visitors and well-wishers who come and see him all the time.”

It’s likely that George will continue to live at the shelter. The staff and volunteers have become attached to him—and people in the community have heard his story and want to visit.

Dinon says George may also have a job opportunity at the shelter, potentially visiting people in hospitals and nursing homes, or comforting children who are going through a rough time, showing them how it’s possible to heal after a terrible experience.

Meanwhile, he’s being pampered by everyone he meets.

“He loves Arby’s roast beef—that’s one of his favorites,” Dinon says. “He is not wanting for anything. He gets plenty of companionship, human and animal. He’s a local celebrity with lots of fans, and everybody at the humane society loves him, so he’s got a good life.”

George has received months of treatment from Debbie Johnson, head veterinarian at the Toledo Area Humane Society, to recover from his severe burns. He may have additional surgery to allow him to blink his eyelids more easily.
Preventing future litters. In March, PETA announced an advertising deal had been struck with Nadya Suleman, known in tabloids everywhere as the “octomom.” Suleman came to national attention in 2009 when the single mother of six gave birth to octuplets conceived through in vitro fertilization. The organization will pay $5,000 and provide a year’s worth of veggie hamburgers and hot dogs to the financially struggling mother of 14 in exchange for displaying a spay/neuter advertisement in her yard. The sign features a photograph of a cat nursing a litter of kittens and the message “Don’t let your dog or cat become an ‘octomom.’ Always spay or neuter.” PETA is no stranger to controversy, but this stunt has drawn a firestorm of criticism, even from many who may support the group’s overall mission. While most comments on The PETA Files Web page endorse the move as a brilliant way to get the spay/neuter message out, many posters on other news websites decry it as tasteless, low, insulting, cruel, and dehumanizing, if not for the mother then for her children. Is the spay/neuter message lost in the bickering?

Real Housepets of Los Angeles County. With reality shows all the rage, the Found Animals Foundation, a Los Angeles-based animal welfare organization, has teamed up with the Southeast Area Animal Control Authority in Downey, Calif., to produce The PawdCast, a daily half-hour show streamed live from the shelter’s adoption annex/webcast studio dubbed The ModPawd. Debuting in March, The PawdCast features pets available for adoption along with global animal news, pet care info, and an Ask The Expert segment, a live chat room in which viewers can get real-time answers to pet-related questions. And ailurophiles can get their kitty fix on The Pawd 24/7, a live webcam that keeps its unblinking eye focused on the cats and kittens who hang out in the ModPawd while they wait for homes. The PawdCast broadcasts weekdays from 4-4:30 Pacific Standard Time at foundanimals.org.

Bad news for bad guys. Jacksonville, Fla., is getting tough on animal crime. The Florida Times Union profiled the city’s Animal Care and Protective Services’ new cruelty investigation team, which launched in January with three animal control officers who focus entirely on enforcing the county’s animal cruelty laws. Within two months of start-up, the team racked up five felony and eight misdemeanor arrests, the first criminal charges in several years, according to division chief Scott Trebatoski. (In the past, he says, people were charged with civil violations and fined.) Trebatoski gives props to the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office for jumping right in to support the officers in obtaining warrants, making arrests, and bringing cases in front of judges. Trebatoski hopes the criminals will be slapped with significant penalties. “The message now being sent to the community is we don’t tolerate this behavior, and you’ll be arrested for it,” he says. “The next message [will be] not only will we arrest you, but you’re going to spend time in jail for doing this.”

Lots of candle wax on the cake. Queenie the kitten was the very first animal rescued by the Dumb Friends League in Denver; if she were around today, she’d be 100 years old in people years. The League opened its doors in 1910 and has since helped more than two million animals. To commemorate its milestone anniversary, the League kicked off a yearlong schedule of events with a birthday party in March attended by 125 staff, volunteers, and special friends. “Pup cakes” and tuna-flavored treats were served to the shelter’s dogs and cats awaiting adoption. The League has an outstanding reputation for excellent care and innovative programs, most notably its animal behavior department, which served as the model for The HSUS’ Pets for Life program.

Blessing in disguise. Animal lovers were furious when the Philadelphia Eagles signed convicted dogfighter and abuser Michael Vick in August 2009, but his presence in the City of Brotherly Love has had unforeseen benefits for pit bulls. The Eagles founded Treating Animals With Kindness (TAWK) in October 2009 as a “community outreach initiative that focuses on public education and awareness to reduce the abuse of animals, promote responsible adoption, encourage spay and neuter and put an end to dog fighting.” In recognition of Spay Day and National Spay/Neuter Month in February, the Eagles’ program donated $20,000 to Faithful Friends, an animal shelter in Wilmington, Del., to assist with its spay/neuter initiatives. The funds support Pit Stop, an outreach and education program offering free spay/neuter, vaccinations, microchipping, training, and supplies to pit bull owners, and Operation CatSnip, which provides assistance for spaying and neutering cats. Anger at Vick has helped area pit bulls in another way: Philadelphia’s Pennsylvania SPCA announced that its Second Chance campaign, launched in August 2009 as a response to Vick’s signing, exceeded its $100,000 fundraising goal, bringing in a total of $116,234 to support sheltering and adoption services for pit bulls.

One big payday. It took the ASPCA less than a week to find 50 shelters eager to do battle with each other in a friendly competition that will save thousands more lives and score the winner a boatload of moola. With its Save More Lives $100,000 Challenge, the organization is asking shelters to achieve positive outcomes for at least 300 more animals during August, September, and October 2010 than they did in the same time period in 2009. The shelter with the largest increase will be awarded a $100,000 grant, with a $25,000 grant given...
to the contestant that involves the greatest number of community members in the effort. Positive outcomes include adoption, transferring animals to partner groups, and returning lost pets to owners. Shortly after it started accepting applications in early April, the ASPCA announced that the response was overwhelming, and the first-come, first-served Challenge had reached its limit of 50 contestants. ASPCA president and CEO Ed Sayres points out that “in the United States, 60 percent of households have a cat or dog, yet 80 percent of these households did not adopt their pet from a shelter.” The $100,000 Challenge aims to galvanize shelters from Maui to Pittsburgh into increasing adoptions through creative, effective promotions.

Pet industry recession-proof? As the recession deepened in 2009, pets often paid the price as their owners suffered job losses and home foreclosures. Animal shelters across the country stepped in to help with free pet food and subsidized veterinary care, but still saw sharp increases in surrenders. But some are still spending big bucks on their pets. While many retail businesses have suffered downturns during the recession, the American Pet Products Association (APPA) reported in February that spending on companion animals continues to climb—up 5.4 percent in 2009 compared to 2008, jumping from $43.2 billion to $45.5 billion. Veterinary care led health-care-related pet spending categories with an 8.5 percent increase, fueled by advances in veterinary medicine that enable pets to live longer. More people worked longer hours in 2009, the APPA reports, spurring a greater need for enterprises such as doggie daycare and pet sitting and walking. Other service-based businesses are booming as well, including pooper-scoopers, animal trainers, and even massage therapists. More pet industry statistics and trends are available at americanpetproducts.org/press_industrytrends.asp.